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NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Attorney General and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Advanced Education

WELCOMEBC DOUBLES FUNDING FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING

VICTORIA – British Columbia has doubled funding for basic English language training services for immigrant adults from $15.6 million in 2005/06 to $32.5 million in 2008/09, Attorney General and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism Wally Oppal, Education Minister Shirley Bond and Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell announced today. The announcement highlights English as an Additional Language Awareness Week, April 21 to 26.

"We know that fluency in language is the most critical factor in determining the successful adaptation and integration of newcomers – socially, culturally and economically," said Oppal. "That is why we are more than doubling English language services for immigrants and refugees who require additional supports this year and are continuing to increase English language training for all newcomers who need it."

British Columbia has received over 200,000 immigrants over the past five years. Waitlists for English language services for immigrant adults (ELSA) are now greatly reduced due to the expansion of this training. Basic ELSA provides free English as a second language instruction.

"English language training and other essential workplace skills provide a vital foundation for additional learning that is necessary for the successful integration of newcomers to British Columbia," said Coell, who has responsibility for adult literacy.

WelcomeBC has all expanded immigrant-oriented adult English language and support services for immigrants by over $34 million since 2005/06.

English language support services for immigrant and refugee adults who have come to B.C. under difficult circumstances has increased from $1.75 million in 2005/06 to $3.8 million in 2008/09. Along with English language training, this group of newcomers are provided information about B.C. society and guidance and support for personal and family adjustment problems. They are connected to the broader community through timely information and referral services.

All ELSA services are provided through WelcomeBC, a cross-ministry platform that provides settlement and integration services to newcomers. The Ministry of Education provides these services as a part of ReadNow, the Province's literary action plan.

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"Strong English language skills help immigrants make the most of the many opportunities here, furthering B.C.'s booming economy," said Bond, also Minister responsible for Early Learning and Literacy. "In addition to this year's increase in funding to support ESL students, the government recently announced that it will count refugee students, who often require additional English support, twice a year to ensure that districts receive the funding they need to support ESL learners who arrive mid-year."

To support immigrants entering the workforce, advanced language training to assist people in accessing the labour market has been added to the language curriculum. In 2008/09, funding for this training is $15.4 million.

All English language training for adult newcomers is supported under WelcomeBC, a provincial initiative announced by Premier Gordon Campbell June 13, 2007. Funding is provided in large part by the Government of Canada through the Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Co-operation on Immigration. WelcomeBC helps immigrants moving to B.C. access existing and expanded services under a single umbrella, to assist them in better adapting to life in their new communities. Visit: www.WelcomeBC.ca.

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